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Ferns at home and visiting

KATE D. SPALDING

(PLATE 3)

In the course of a short walk one summer day, I found seven different kinds of ferns and picked a frond from each plant just for the love of them. A friend, seeing them, exclaimed, "They all look alike to me!" It hardly seems possible that a person having eyes should see so little of beauty around him.

There is no more fascinating study for the amateur botanist than ferns, especially if he lives in a locality where they are abundant. Everyone admires their graceful beauty. After having been familiar with their forms all of one's life, it is most interesting to learn to call these neighbors by their names. The widespread popularity of nature study has opened our eyes to many things hitherto unnoticed. If one has a hobby, that hobby is a source of pleasure wherever one goes, and keeps one young. Rue the day when you cease to be absorbingly interested in some specialty.

The first visit to the woods after one has begun to learn more about the growing things will be different from any other trip. I well remember such an occasion. It was on a late September afternoon when the summer's growth was finished. Overhead arched magnificent trees, while the rays of the setting sun cast a golden glow over all. Ferns on every side! Rocks and mounds entirely concealed by the walking fern and big bunches of the cinnamon, spinulose, and other large ferns, often named brakes by the uninitiated, while from the crevices of the rock formation at our feet peeped out rosettes of the dainty maidenhair spleenwort. That student is fortunate who has the woods of New York State or Vermont for his fern textbook.

But one need not depend on going to the often distant



A FERN CORNER.

woods in order to enjoy a sight of ferns. Ferns are ornamental in a suitable corner of the garden and will repay the labor expended upon them many times over in the pleasure they give. A fern cannot be transplanted to any place but will take kindly to civilization if it has plenty of shade, moisture, and good soil. First of all, it is necessary to prepare the bed carefully. Dig out the space required at least two feet and fill in with rich loam or preferably with leaf mold from near-by woods if possible, at least have a top dressing of soil from the woods.

A certain fernery was planted, quite successfully, with three divisions, a swamp, a plain, and a hillside in miniature. The swamp was contrived from a box sunk into the ground and partly filled with loam and moss. Here were planted such ferns as lived in wet places and the box was filled with water twice a day. Over the edge drooped the lovely royal fern (*Osmunda regalis*) and near by lived the sensitive fern (*Onoclea sensibilis*), while in the box were planted the marsh shield fern and the chain ferns.

By far the greater variety of ferns was found in the next division, which was arranged as much as possible like the natural woods, with rocks and logs and leaf mold. Sturdiest among them, and even crowding its neighbors, was the ostrich fern (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*) with its graceful vaselike formation. In the background towered taller ferns, the Goldie (*Dryopteris Goldiana*) and the Clinton (*Dryopteris Clintoniana*), both of which ferns had flourished for many years far from their native wood and had been retransplanted to this garden. The cinnamon fern (*Osmunda cinnamomea*) always did well, sending up more large woolly croziers each spring. The marginal (*Dryopteris marginalis*) and the spinulose (*Dryopteris spinulosa*) together with the Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*) gave an evergreen touch to the bed. The narrow-leaved spleenwort (*Athyrium angustifolium*) and the interrupted fern (*Osmunda Claytoniana*) also flour-

ished, but the delicate oak fern (*Phegopteris dryopteris*) did not take so kindly to transplanting. The crested fern (*Dryopteris cristata*) and the maidenhair (*Adiantum pedatum*) made good growth while the lady fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*) grew rank in sunshine or shade. These ferns with others formed a mass of luxuriant foliage from early spring until the frost came. During the winter a covering of leaves was laid over the bed and in spring only a part of the dressing was removed, thus giving the woods corner a more natural look, besides adding in time to the fertility of the soil. Altogether, considering the small space used and the little care required after the first labor, only a good watering each day, that corner gave the owner more enjoyment and satisfaction than any other part of the garden.

At the farther side of the fern bed was built a rockery where ferns requiring little soil could imagine themselves clinging to their native hillsides. These ferns showed more homesickness than the others, but still did survive. Of course the bulblet bladder fern (*Filix bulbifera*) grew everywhere and with its lacy fronds covered up the bare places, while its sister, the fragile bladder fern was the beauty of the early spring. The purple cliff brake (*Pellaea atropurpurea*) showed itself hardy under new conditions and the maidenhair spleenwort (*Asplenium trichomanes*) grew to quite a large size. The Woodsias did fairly well but the ebony spleenwort (*Asplenium platyneuron*) and the walking fern (*Camptosorus rhizophyllus*) grew very slowly.

The primary object of this particular fernery was not so much a beauty spot as a collection of as many varieties of ferns as possible in small space, but it could not help being a beauty spot just the same. If one does not live in a locality where many kinds of ferns are found, there are dealers who make a specialty of supplying them. If a fernery is chiefly to beautify the garden, a selection of

larger ferns, such as grew in the middle section of this corner, would give more satisfaction than the small rock ferns.

Another attractive feature of this fern bed was the wild flowers. Many sprang up from seeds in the soil, while others were brought from the woods. It was a source of early spring pleasure, while the croziers of the ferns were slowly unfolding, to watch for new blossoms each day, Jack-in-the-pulpit, hepaticas, violets, coltsfoot, Solomon's seal and others in their season. Even cowslips and cardinal flowers were persuaded to blossom in the swamp box. A sprig of meadow rue, a goldenrod, and a Joe-pye-weed also found a footing in this goodly company. Each day some new and charming aspect presented itself to the watcher, and with no extra labor. All these friends ask is to be left alone under favorable conditions and they will fulfill their destiny to the best of their ability.

Henry Ward Beecher once said:

"Ferns and flowers are the only things God made and forgot to put a soul into them."

SYRACUSE, N. Y.

Notes and news

Mr. William R. Maxon, of the United States National Museum, leaves on a collecting trip to Panama at the end of January.

On the evening of January 12, 1911, Mr. Robert A. Ware gave a talk on New England ferns before the Boston members of the Appalachian Mountain Club. He discussed the structure and growth of the fern and showed specimens of all the species native to New England. Other members of the American Fern Society who were present are Messrs. F. G. Floyd, H. G. Rugg, and E. J. Winslow.